

#9 - Romans 1:24-32

"Certain new theologians dispute original sin, which is the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved," - G.K. Chesterton

Context:

"Paul's indictment of humanity in 1:18-3:8 proceeds as if it were moving inward through a series of concentric circles:

- from the whole of humanity (1:18),
- to humanity apart from special revelation -- mainly, then, Gentiles (1:19-32),
- to the "righteous" person -- but mainly the Jew (2:1-16),
- to the Jew explicitly (2:17-3:8)."
 - (Moo, NICNT, p. 92)

Chronological Pattern in this Passage (1:18-32) (from St. Helen's Bishopsgate, 44)

- Revelation by God
- Rejection by humankind
- God is angry
- Handed over to sins
- Death

I. God gave them up (v. 24, 26, 28)

- Human side of things: See Ephesians 4:17-19
- "[the lost] enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded, and are therefore self-enslaved." - C.S. Lewis (quoted in Thiselton, 86)
- "God allows us to walk through the door we have chosen." - Tim Keller, 30)
- "He [God] ceased to hold the boat as it was dragged by the current of the river." - Godet (quoted in Moo, 111)
 - Moo continues though: "But the meaning of 'hand over' demands that we give God a more active role as the initiator of the process. God does not simply let the boat go—he gives it a push downstream. Like a judge who hands over a prisoner to the punishment his crime has earned, God hands over the sinner to the terrible cycle of ever-increasing sin. (Moo, 111)"
- "It may require a big change in our thinking if we are to recognize these sinful acts for what they are, not the cause of God's wrath, but the present evidence for its reality... Our sins do not demonstrate our independence from God, as some might suppose. They should be seen as evidence of the fact that he is angry at our rebellion against Him and, furthermore, as a warning signal of worse to come." - St. Helen's Church, Bishopsgate (43, 45)

- "Here we learn that [God's] anger goes 'quietly and invisibly' to work in handing sinners over to themselves. God abandons stubborn sinners to their willful self-centeredness, and the resulting process of moral and spiritual degeneration is to be understood as a judicial act of God."
- (Stott, *Romans*, John Stott Bible Studies, p. 16)

To what:

- "...in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves." (v. 24)
 - "Lusts" = "over-desire" - "an all-controlling drive and longing...The main problem of our heart is not so much desires for bad things, but our over-desires for god things, our turning of created, good things into gods, objects of our worship and service." (Keller, 29)
- "...to dishonorable passions." (v. 26)
- "...to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done." (v. 28)

Why? Three Exchanges

- "Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things." (v. 22-23)
- "...because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen." (v. 25)
 - "The tragedy of humanity is that we strive for and fail to find what we could simply receive and enjoy." - Tim Keller (29)
- "...for their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another..." (v. 26-27)

II. Idolatry's Definition (v. 25)

What is idolatry?

Idolatry is trusting in created things rather than the Creator for our hope and happiness, significance and security.

- Conversion is the opposite movement (1 Thess. 1:9)

At the root of every sin is idolatry!

- What lie am I believing?
- What desire is misplaced?

"Paul saw no reason to dissent from the Jewish insight that regarded 'sin' --- living in a less-than-fully-human fashion, missing the mark as regards God's intention for his human creatures --- as the result of worshiping something other than the creator."
(Wright, NIB, p. 430)

"Bad theology and worship, in a morally structured universe, leads to bad ethics."

III. Sexual Immorality

A. Sex outside of Marriage (v. 24)

- cf. Rom. 6:19; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 4:19; Col. 3:5

B. Homosexuality (v. 26-27)

"The Bible is clear, both in the Old and New Testaments, that active homosexual sex as a settled, unrepentant pattern of behavior is indicative of an attitude of rejection of Jesus' lordship, and leaves people outside his kingdom (see 1 Corinthians 6:9-10), though never outside his real (v. 11)." - Tim Keller

"Rom. 1:26-27...have traditionally been seen to teach clearly that both male and female forms of same-sexual activity are shameful and contrary to the natural order established by God. The consensus among the commentators is still that this is a correct reading of the text." (*Some Issues in Human Sexuality*, quoted in Thiselton 88)

"Homosexual behaviour is the sin of rebellion against God, an outward manifestation of inward and spiritual rebellion. It illustrates human degradation." (Fitzmyer, quoted in Thiselton, 88)

"Paul's attitude to homosexual practice is unambiguous" (Dunn, quoted in Thiselton, 88)

"Paul notes homosexual practice, both female and male...Out of the many things Paul could have highlighted in the pagan world, he has chosen same-sex erotic practices." (N.T. Wright, quoted in Thiselton, 88)

- "He is not proposing a case-by-case analyses. Rather, his argument is that the existence of homosexual practice in a culture is a sign that culture as a whole has been worshipping idols and that its God-given male-and-female order is being fractured as a result."
- (Wright, NIB, p. 435)

*Interesting how N.T. Wright (Anglican), Douglas Moo & Tim Keller (Protestant [Reformed]), Ben Witherington III (Methodist [Arminian]), James Dunn (Charismatic) and Joseph Fitzmyer (Catholic), all top level New Testament scholars, all agree that homosexual practice is contrary to God's design and a display (result) of idolatry. This is not even to mention the

consistent testimony of the historical church on the matter.

C. Sidebar: Christian Response

- Error 1 : In the current stream of tolerance, let's downplay or reinterpret the Bible's clear teaching on homosexuality.
- Error 2 : In the current stream of "rightness", let's avoid and verbally abuse gay men and women because homosexuality is the worst sin.
 - See Col. 3:5 for greed being equated with idolatry
 - See Gal. 4:8-9 for religiosity and law-keeping being equated with idolatry
 - "Homosexuality is named, therefore, not because it is a greater sin than any other, but because it is the clearest evidence of a rejection of God's order in creation." - St. Helen's Bishopsgate
- "We only grasp the gospel when we understand, as Paul did, that we are the worst sinner we know (1 Timothy 1:15)—and that if Jesus came to die for us, there is no one that he would not die for." (Tim Keller, 35)

IV. Vice List

What is sin?

Sin is rejecting or ignoring God in the world he created, rebelling against him by living without reference to him, not being or doing what he requires in his law—resulting in our death and the disintegration of all creation. (New City Catechism)

- "Anti-social vices" (Thiselton, 90)
- "The harm done by people to other people is thus added to idolatry and sexual perversion to complete Paul's sketch of the world outside Christ." (Moo, 119)
- Keller's Breakdown:
 - Economic Disorder - "greed"
 - Social Disorder - "murder, strife, deceit and malice"
 - Family Breakdown - "disobedience to parents"
 - Relational Breakdown - "senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless"
 - "Total Depravity: while not everything we do is always completely sinful, nothing we do is completely untouched by sin." (35)

Verse 32

"...the process of God's 'giving people up' to the result of their own folly...is simply the anticipation of the final judgment itself, the 'death' spoken of in 1:32 and the ultimate judgment described in 2:5-6, 9. Present moral degradation (and physical, too, in many cases) anticipates the ultimate degrading of humanness in death itself."

(Wright, NIB, p. 431)

"It is one thing to live a self-destructive life-style, recognizing it for what it is, grieving over it,

and urging others to avoid it if they can. It is another, more sinister, thing to call evil good and good evil. Once light and darkness have been renamed, the process of dehumanization is complete and may well prove irreversible."

(Wright, NIB, p. 434)

"When the gods wish to punish us, they answer our prayers." - Oscar Wilde (quoted in Keller, 30)

Questions for Thought and Continuing Discussion:

- How would Paul correct the following statements?
 - 'We fall into sin' (i.e. we can't really help ourselves)
 - 'Sinning means we are free'
 - 'The main problem with sin is that it messes up our lives'
 - 'In response to this passage we should stop sinning and live better lives.'